

STMA-36

CHAPEL-HOUSE AND SCHOOL (The Great Brick Chapel of St. Mary's)

St. Mary's City

1638

Built by 1638, this Roman Catholic chapel-house became a part of the so-called "Jesuit Controversy" when in April 1641 Lord Baltimore ordered Governor Leonard Calvert to purchase it and the surrounding land from Father Thomas Copley, S.J. It is believed that this chapel was destroyed by Richard Ingle in 1645 during the Parliamentary troubles and later rebuilt. The rebuilt chapel was described in 1667 as a solid structure of brick, and in 1669 a Robert Pennywell was given twenty lashes for breaking "the glasse windows of the Chappell at St. Maries."

There is a tradition that John Coade again destroyed the chapel during the Revolution of 1689. If so, it was rebuilt, to be closed with the Catholic schools by Governor John Seymour's 1704 "Act to Prevent Popery." After the closing the chapel was taken down and the bricks used in the construction of St. Inigoes Manor House.

In 1697 Governor Francis Nicholson wrote to the English Board of Trade that the Jesuits had a brick school at St. Mary's City. It is likely that the foundations of this school are on the chapel lot.

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**A unique aspect of early Maryland was its dedication to religious freedom. Lord Baltimore sought to avoid the religious conflicts of Europe by allowing all Christians in the colony the free practice of their faiths--and freedom from governmental interference. The Chapel Field here at St. Mary's City was the focal point of this revolutionary idea.**

### History of the Chapel Field

Shortly after the founding of Maryland in 1634, Jesuit Father Andrew White constructed the first Catholic Chapel in British America on property named "the Chapel Land" in a 1639 document. According to legend, this chapel was used by both Catholics and Protestants for religious services during the first years of settlement. Catholic colonists built a new chapel in the same area by 1642, but it was apparently destroyed during Ingle's Rebellion in 1645.

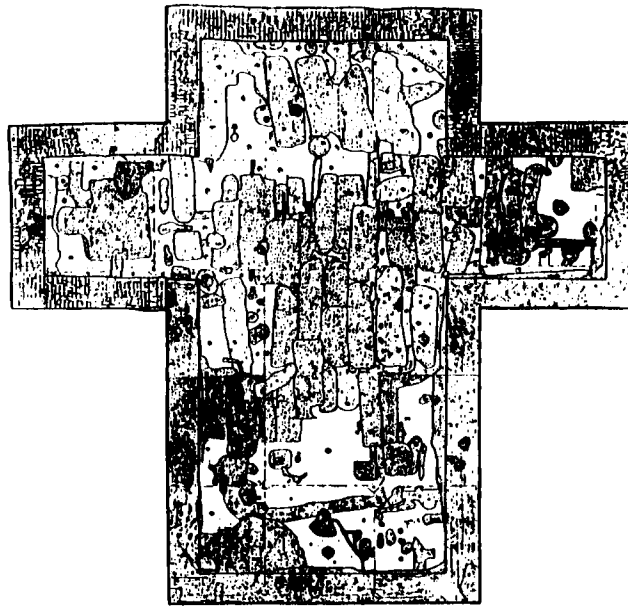
In the 1660s, the Chapel Field witnessed the construction of a massive brick structure, very different from those earlier wooden structures. The great Brick Chapel was an elaborate and monumental building. It served as the center of Catholic worship in Maryland until the late 17th Century. The spirit of toleration ended in 1704 when public worship of the Catholic faith was forbidden by law and the royal governor ordered the chapel closed and locked.

Shortly afterward, the Brick Chapel was torn down and its bricks used to construct a new manor house on the nearby Jesuit lands at St. Inigoes. What happened on the Chapel Land during the 1700s is unknown, but by the American Revolution farmers had converted it into agricultural fields. This important site continued to be farmed for over two hundred years.

### Archaeology of the Brick Chapel

In 1938, H. Chandler Loomis conducted excavations in the Chapel Field. While no historical or architectural information about the Chapel had survived from the 17th Century, Forman's work discovered that the brick building was cross-shaped with massive, three-foot thick walls. This building was rediscovered by Historic St. Mary's City archaeologists in 1983, and a major scientific investigation of the Chapel remains began in 1988.

Excavations reveal that the brick Chapel was 54 feet long and 57 feet across at the arms of the cross or transepts. It had an imported stone floor, plastered walls, and its windows were formed using special mullion bricks. The brick foundation extends five feet



*Archaeological Site Plan of the Great Brick Chapel*

below the ground level. This evidence suggests that the Chapel's walls were very high, measuring 25 to 30 feet from the ground to the roof. The Chapel was the first major brick building in the colony. The existence of such a massive and elaborate structure in 1660s Maryland is very surprising. Its presence symbolizes the strength of religious toleration during that time.

### The First Chapel and Jesuit Mission

Test excavations have revealed additional clusters of artifacts dating to the 1630s and 1640s. Faint traces of early wooden buildings are present as well. Many of these materials can be associated with the first Chapel built by Father Andrew White. However, there are several additional buildings from this early period in the Chapel Field. These appear to be part of the only English Jesuit Mission complex known in North America. Exploration of this important early site is continuing.

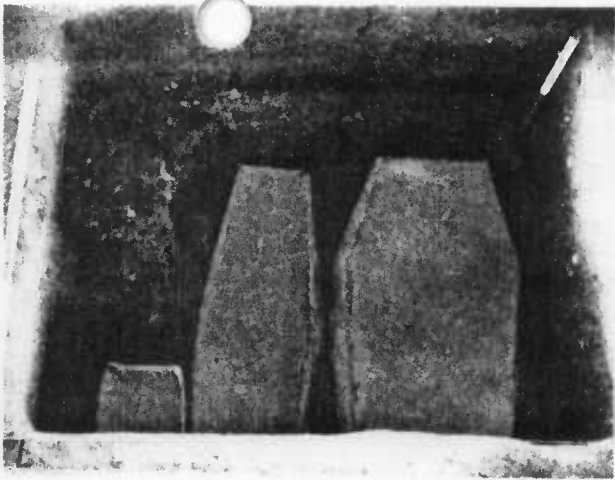
### The Cemetery

Around and under these Chapels is the oldest known colonial cemetery in Maryland. Buried here are the remains of many of Maryland's founders, including the first governor, Leonard Calvert. Archaeologists have found over 100 graves and there may be 200 others not yet located. The burials range in date from ca. 1635 to ca. 1725.

### Lead Coffins

The most dramatic of the archaeological discoveries in the Chapel Field is the uncovering of three 17th-century lead coffins. They are the first found by archaeologists in the New World. Who lies buried in the coffins? We do not know but suspect that they contain members of the Calvert family, the founding family of Maryland.

To answer this fascinating question and learn what the coffins can tell us about life in early America, Historic St. Mary's City has called together a Technical Assistance Committee. Composed of nationally-prominent scientists in fields ranging from physics and geology to forensic science, this team will conduct a major investigation of the coffins. Modern science, archaeology, and history have joined forces in this unique project.



Archaeologists discovered three lead coffins during the last week of the excavation season in November of 1990.

Project Lead Coffins will include analysis of the 17th-century air, pollen, and soil; study of DNA, immunoglobulin, and bone isotopes; and the making of cranial casts and facial reconstructions of the individuals. After their identification, all human remains will be reburied with proper religious rites at the Chapel Site and their graves marked.

### The Priest's House Site

In 1938, Dr. Forman also found a structure he called the "Priest's House," which he believed was associated with the Brick Chapel. Excavations in 1992, however, indicate that this building probably dates to the 1700 to 1750 period. It had a brick foundation which supported wooden walls. Numerous artifacts indicate that it was used as a residence. Who lived here and the purpose of this building remain a mystery.

*See Vertical File For Further information.*

### To Restore a Legacy

The historical importance of the Chapel Field is immeasurable. Planned reconstruction of the Brick Chapel as a legacy of the St. Mary's City experience will allow us to tell the story of Maryland's contribution to religious freedom. This unique example of colonial architecture will serve once more as a powerful symbol of Lord Baltimore's bold social and religious experiment.

Funding for the Chapel Field Project comes from the State of Maryland, a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Historic St. Mary's City Foundation, the Friends of Historic St. Mary's City, and private donations.

For information on how you can help us Restore a Legacy, please contact Historic St. Mary's City, Box 39, St. Mary's City, MD 20686; 301/862-0990.



Historic St. Mary's City

*"The most remarkable thing we've done in archaeology in this state, for now, and for years to come."*

Governor William Donald Schaefer  
Comments at the Chapel Site during  
the discovery of the lead coffins, December 4, 1990

# The Chapel Field

A Legacy of  
Religious Freedom  
at Historic St. Mary's City,  
Maryland's  
17th-Century Capital



Religious medal of St. Francis Xavier dating to the 1640s. Found during excavations in St. Mary's City.





FIGURE 72: Foundations of the Catholic Chapel, Partially uncovered by Archaeologists. Built about 1670 and dismantled in 1705.



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The Brick Chapel of St. Mary's, site  
(Chapel, House, and School)

Northwest Elevation

J. Kozlay

9/24/94

# The Brick Chapel of St. Mary's



You Are Here ●

*Floor plan of the Chapel as excavated by Archaeology.*

## Maryland's First Brick Building

Massive brick foundations, three feet wide and five feet deep, are in the ground before you. They are the remains of Maryland's first major brick building, "The Brick Chapel", built about 1667 in the form of a cross, measured 55 feet long and 57 feet wide at the arms of the cross. In frontier Maryland, where most settlers lived in humble wood cottages, this was a remarkable building.

Archaeologists have found over 100 grave shafts under and outside the Chapel and there are undoubtedly many others. This site was a cemetery for St. Mary's City from the early years of settlement. Many early Marylanders lie under this field in long forgotten graves. In addition to these graves, three lead coffins have been discovered in the chapel. These are the first lead coffins found by archaeologists in North America. They were buried in the left arm or Transept of the cross-shaped building.

Excavations in the Chapel Field were supported by the State of Maryland, a grant from the National Endowment for Humanities and Private donations.



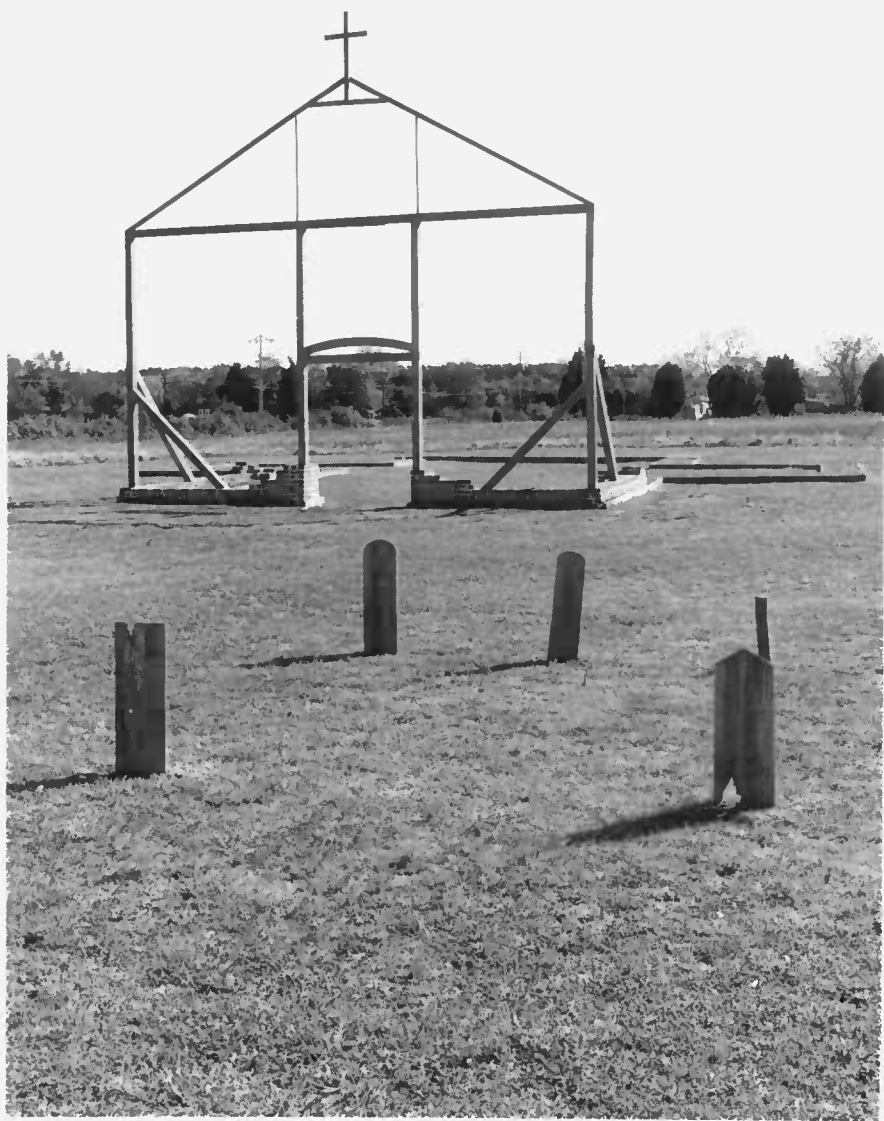
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The Brick Chapel of St. Mary's, site  
(Chapel, House, and School)

Sign Board

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The Great Brick Chapel of St. Mary's E. Priest: Nourse (1910)

St. Mary's Cemetery, Md

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